

## Lamenting as a Dominant Speech Act in *Riders to the Sea*

### La lamentación como un acto de discurso dominante en *Riders to the Sea*

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#### ABSTRACT

Aran Islands in the north of Ireland are populated by the fishermen community whose life struggle continues with the dominant natural force of sea. Tragedy is a common aspect in the lives of these men and their speech reflects expression of emotion of suffering, agony, etc. in the wake of a tragic incident. J. M. Synge as a recognized Irish dramatist dramatizes the sufferings of the Irish fishermen through the play 'Riders to the Sea'. It is a brief, one-act play, with straight forward action that engages the reader with questions of how death affects individuals and families. The sea on which the family is dependant has brought death to the head of the family and his sons. Maurya, the mother, the central figure, is the great sufferer who has lost her husband and six sons. Murya and her two daughters are desolate and give vent to their grief through speech acts of lamenting. It is essential to make a linguistic pragmatic analysis of the contextual potentials of the utterances dealing with their emotions on account of the tragic events that they encounter. The present paper is an attempt to make a pragmatic study of lamenting in the play and to see how the speech act dramatizes the sufferings of the poor women and how the dramatist makes heavy use of the lamenting speech act.

**Key words:** lamenting, pragmatics, speech acts, death, suffering.

#### RESUMEN

Las islas Aran en el norte de Irlanda están pobladas por la comunidad de pescadores cuya lucha de vida continúa con la fuerza natural dominante del mar. La tragedia es un aspecto común en la vida de estos hombres y su discurso refleja la expresión de la emoción del sufrimiento, la agonía, etc. a raíz de un trágico incidente. J. M. Synge, como reconocido dramaturgo irlandés, dramatiza los sufrimientos de los pescadores irlandeses a través de la obra "Riders to the Sea". Es una obra breve, de un solo acto, con acción directa que involucra al lector con preguntas sobre cómo la muerte afecta a las personas y las familias. El mar del que depende la familia ha llevado la muerte al jefe de la familia y a sus hijos. Maurya, la madre, la figura central, es la gran víctima que ha perdido a su esposo y sus seis hijos. Murya y sus dos hijas están desoladas y dan rienda suelta a su dolor a través de actos de lamento de lamento. Es esencial hacer un análisis lingüístico pragmático de los potenciales contextuales de las expresiones que tratan con sus emociones a causa de los trágicos eventos que encuentran. El presente trabajo es un intento de hacer un estudio pragmático del lamento en la obra y ver cómo el acto del habla dramatiza los sufrimientos de las mujeres pobres y cómo el dramaturgo hace un uso intensivo del acto de habla lamentable.

**Palabras clave:** lamentos, pragmática, actos de habla, muerte, sufrimiento.

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## Introduction

Human beings are prone to express emotions according to the context and situation and use appropriate linguistic forms. Lamenting, the expression of grief and suffering is result of an experience of death or similar tragedy of dear and near ones and its impact on the emotions of the interlocutor/s. It is not merely a vehicle for emotional release but is a multifaceted human expression of emotion. The present article deals with a study of expressions of lamenting speech act which is indicative of a form of mourning at the death of the head of the family and young men in J. M. Synge's (1871-1909) play *Riders to the Sea* (1904). Lamentation as a speech act is the language of suffering. In Ackermann's words, it is 'a language for dealing with, although not solving, the problem of suffering' (2003:100). The Speech Act Theory concerns with the ways in which language can be used. It originated with Austin, but was developed by Searle and several other scholars. Searle thought that like other acts, language use itself is an act and through words people perform or indicate actions. Searle identified five speech acts: representatives, directives, commissives, declaratives and expressives. Interlocutors give way to their feelings as per the context and convey a lot of meaning. A drama or a play deals with interlocutors' reactions to the issues that crop up in the context in tune with interpersonal relations, hence such a text is full of expressives. Searle's theory integrates with theory of discourse structure, because if speech acts are identifiable as units of language, then it must be possible to include them in a model of discourse. Lamenting is a valuable subject of study, due to its high communicative value. And so, the current study deals with a pragmatic analysis of the phenomenon of 'lamenting' in J. M. Synge's short play.

## The Statement of the Problem

J. M. Synge dramatized the sufferings of the Irish fishermen through *Riders to the Sea*. In this brief one-act play, straight forward action engages the reader with questions of how deaths caused in the struggle of life lead to grief and drastically affect individuals and families. The sea on which the family is dependant has brought death to the head of the family and his sons in a family. Maurya, the mother, the central figure, is the great sufferer who has lost her husband and six sons. A linguistic pragmatic analysis of the contextual potentials of the utterances given to the characters in dealing with their emotions on account of the tragic events that they encounter becomes essential. The present paper is an attempt to make a pragmatic study of lamenting in the play and to see how the speech act dramatizes the sufferings of the poor women and seeks answers the following:

1. What expressive speech acts are used in the play *Riders to the Sea*?
2. How is 'lamenting' the dominant speech act in the play?
3. What are the literary functions of lamenting found in the source text?
4. What is the significance of the speech acts of laments in the chosen data?

## Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that J. M. Synge uses the prominent speech act of lamenting for giving a heart rendering expression to the tragic emotion of the interlocutors in the play *Riders to the Sea*.

## Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Collecting relevant data and analyzing it keeping in view the expressive speech acts with focus on lamenting in *Riders to the Sea*.
2. Finding out the pragmatic meaning of lamenting speech acts in *Riders to the Sea*.
3. Correlating the functions of lamenting to the theme of the source text.

## The Procedure

The steps in the current study are as follows:

1. Reviewing the related literature about the pragmatics of expressive speech acts.
2. Collection of viable data for the analysis from the play selected for the study.
3. Analysis and interpretation of the data from pragmatic point of view taking into consideration the Speech Acts.

## Scope and Significance of the Study

The study is limited to the explicating of data related to the expression of lamenting and analysis of the same from the perspective of speech acts in the source text. It also attempts to make a review of the speech acts and justifies how lamenting falls within the purview of the speech acts. It also tries to connect the pragmatic function of speech

act of lamenting within the expressive act to the core theme of the play. It is hoped that this study will pave a way to investigate the notion of the speech act of lamentation from a cross-cultural exploration. The study will prove to be valuable for the readers and interpreters to pay attention to speech act of lamenting in the interpretation of the present text or any other similar dramatic discourse. It also expects that relevant expressive speech acts can be studied in the literary texts that exhibit deep emotions of the interlocutors.

### Literature Review

The present study attempts to make study of lamenting speech act within the large scope of pragmatics. Hence, studies in issues in pragmatics with special reference to speech acts, their types and their functional roles and the turns taken by interlocutors play an important role. Extensive studies are available in the aforesaid areas and have been reviewed. Vehemence is given to the study and review of expressive speech acts including lamenting. Along with this, a study of J. M. Synge as a dramatist and reviews, critical comments related to *Riders to the Sea* have been made. Lamenting is considered as a written text that expresses intense agony, suffering, sorrow, regret at the loss of the dear and near person. Several print and digital materials have been reviewed related to the present study. The characters use peculiar language in the context to express lament. It is due to the loss of particular person/s or a family member/s or a tragic event. The women in the source play face tragic events of deaths of men in the family leading to excessive expression of lament. The study aims to analyse how the author makes use of speech act of lamenting to give better expression to the sufferings of the women.

### Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The present study adopts qualitative method of data collection as the research is based on the features of phenomena and the data being analyzed are non-numerical. It entails collecting primarily textual data, analyzing and investigating it using pragmatic issues. The method gives clear description about the focus of the research. After collecting the relevant data from the source text, it is analyzed from the view point of speech acts. In explaining the result of data analysis, descriptive-qualitative method is applied in which all the results that are related to the object of data analysis in this study will be described. The following steps have been followed: Reading the text, identifying the utterances that contain lamenting speech acts, classifying the utterances, analyzing the utterances containing lamenting speech acts and drawing conclusion.

### Pragmatics and Speech Acts

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies how utterances are used to mean more than what they actually mean because of the context in which they are used. When someone says to 'I will see you tomorrow at 5pm' it could be a promise, a threat or warning depending on the context of the communication. Speakers do not always use language only to literally mean what the words convey. Their language conveys deeper meaning depending on the context in which the utterance is used. On the other hand, pragmatics makes it easy for the listeners to explore how a listener can make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning. This type of study explores how a great deal of what is unsaid is recognized as a part of what is communicated. It can be said that pragmatics is the investigation of invisible meaning with the help of the visible utterance placing it in the context. According to *Levinson (1983)*, "pragmatics is concerned solely with performance principles of language usage and the disambiguation of the sentence by the context in which they were uttered." It is the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language. *Parker (1986)* also states, "pragmatics is distinct from grammar, which is the study of the internal structure of language. pragmatics is the study of how language is used to communicate." According to *Jacob Mey (1993)* pragmatics is the study of the conditions of human language use as these are determined by the context of society.

The study of speech acts is one of the prominent aspects of pragmatics which can be defined as any action that is communicated or achieved via the medium of speech (or language in general). Speech is identified as one of the acts of language use. While speaking, interlocutors perform different acts like promising, issuing a warning or a threat, ordering someone to do something or requesting for something, etc. Literary critics have studied speech acts theory to throw light on the hidden aspects of the texts or to assign functional value to the language used in literary texts. According to *Levinson (1979)*, "Asking how a particular communicative act functions in a particular society presupposes that we examine the conditions that hold for communication in that society. The languages we use, in particular the speech act we utter, are entirely dependent on the context of the situation in which such acts are produced. All speech is situated speech; a speech act is never just an 'act of speech, but should be considered in the total situation of activity of which it is a part."

The division of speech acts into different subcategories largely goes back to the work of *Austin (1962)* and *Searle*

(1969, 1976). Speech act theory derives largely from works of the British philosopher John Austin. Austin's ideas were further developed by some philosophers and linguists like John R. Searle, H. Paul Grice and Geoffrey N. Leech. Austin introduced three main types aspects of his speech acts theory. According to him a speech act consists of three separate components: (a) **the locutionary act** refers to the actual act of saying or uttering something, this is the basic content of what is said. (b) **the illocutionary act** refers to what one is trying to do by speaking, that is the intention of the speaker. (c) **the perlocutionary act** refers to the effect or the consequence of what is said on the listener.

### Expressive Speech Acts and their Classification

John Searle is the next important philosopher of language who contributed to the understanding of speech acts. He noted that an expressive speech acts expresses the mental or psychological state or attitude towards an event that is presumed to be true. Verbs that are used to form illocutionary acts include *thank, congratulate, apologize, condole, deplore, lament, welcome, forgive, boast* are said to be expressive speech acts. Whenever we use an expressive illocutionary act, we express the speaker's attitude towards a proposition. The truth values of the proposition, that is, whether those things that you congratulate someone for, or apologize to someone. Verbal expressions are typically used to portray our general surroundings, yet they may likewise urge individuals to get things done, or even comprise activities themselves, for example where a marriage is articulated by a speaker who by his office is engaged to do as such, or when a ship is named in a ship-naming function. J. M. Synge's play displays the expressive acts of condoling, deploring and lamenting. Since the women witness deaths of responsible men at home, they lament the deaths which has brought a tremendous change in their life.

### The Play *Riders to the Sea*

The play *Riders to the Sea* deals with the theme of life and death, tradition and modernity, paganism and fatality. It dramatizes the sufferings of the three women on an island cottage who wait for the news of missing son of the family. Maurya, the mother, is resting in an inner room and her daughters, Cathleen and Nora, are working on household tasks and identify the clothes of Michael and realize his loss after other brothers and father. Considering the emotion of the mother, they are not eager to tell her the dark truth about Cathleen.

The women are survived by young man Bartley. He announces that he will be sailing that night and would go to the horse fair in Connemara despite the bad weather. His mother Maurya is anxious and expects him not to go as he is the only son left but Bartley prepares for his journey. He insists on going and as he leaves with two family horses for sale, Maurya does not bless him. Bartley distresses his sisters. Maurya's getting angry at his departure is a bad omen and the sisters too have forgotten to give him a cake. They suggest their mother to go to meet Bartley to give him the cake and her blessing but Maurya returns distressed. She tells that she met Bartley but could not give him her blessing. She says she saw the ghost of his brother Michael behind him and they take it as an unlucky sign. Cathleen gives vent to her suffering, 'It's destroyed we are from this day.' After Maurya's return, a noise of crying out by the seashore is heard. People bring in the body of Bartley. Maurya is in utter grief as she laments, 'They're all together this time, and the end is come.'

### Analysis of Lamenting Speech Acts

lamenting is an emotional grief expression of human related to an event. Laments also epitomize appeal for the divine help in distress. It is the grief that mostly often born of mourning or regret over the loss of someone and whatever the person signifies.

There are different ways to express laments, the verbal manner is one of the ways to express laments, where the lament about something or somebody they've lost, generally, it occurred with crying or moaning. Although lamentation is used in both drama and poetry since early ages. Regarding this analysis, lamentation is pointed as a sincere expressive speech act. In the opening of the play, Synge used to express the feelings of sadness, grief on the death of Maurya's husband and her sons. It represents the conflict between life and death and between passions and emotions.

The play is characteristic of simplicity of tragic plot and the distinctive language use by the interlocutors. It is an example of how an author can make use of speech act of lamenting predominantly in the entire play. The reactions of the women and their dialogues in relation to the events that take place engage the audience and make him think of the impact of the natural forces like sea. It is full of expressive speech acts related to the suffering, grief, dejection, unhappiness, loss and the upcoming life pattern without the presence of men, the bread earners of the family.

Economy and emotional impact are the features of language of *Riders to the Sea*. Synge was deeply influenced by the speech patterns of the interlocutors of the Aran Islands which forms the setting of the play. The climate, life patterns on the sea shore, the nature of the work that people carry out lead to the perennial sufferings of the people which is reflected in the speech and the emotion implied. Synge spent time listening to and recording the distinctive speech patterns of the Aran Islands before writing the play. The rhythm of the direct and indirect speech acts define the rhythm and emotion of the play. Characters take unusual turns in speech in the wake of the actions take around hence it is characteristic of the tenor of the situation around.

Words have suggestive meaning dealing with loss and suffering. When, at the beginning of the play, Cathleen laments, 'It's destroyed he'll be, surely,' means that her brother Bartley will be expecting something to eat, but the words can also be read as a prophecy of his death.

Synge's characters presented in the play are accepted the reality of death, but cannot hide their suffering. The sea plays as a constant threat. It is at the same time a source of livelihood. The objects of death in the form of coffins, keening, and speech acts of mourning, lamenting over death are prevalent in the play. The play primarily deals with the theme of death and suffering. Sea on which the fisherman's family is dependant for livelihood has brought deaths of all the men in the only the women at home in utter desolation. *Riders to the Sea* played a significant role in theatre and literary activity. It is considered a classic of the Irish literature which led the revival of new Irish literature.

The author, through the play, has created a language which pertains to the Irish peasantry, fishermen in particular. Synge give artistic expression to desolate life led in the Aran Islands and suggests the necessity of fashioning a language based upon the speech of the Irish peasantry. Synge's deliberate choice of lamenting speech acts represents and points out the reality of sad, uncertain life of the fishermen for whom lamenting is the predominant expression.

As the play opens, the two sisters, Nora and Cathleen, who are working at home are conscious about the suffering mother for recent loss of her son Michael and speak in low voice and express their concern that she is unable to sleep and do not want to disturb her. Cathleen expresses her worry about mother in the words:

*"God help her, and maybe sleeping, if she's able"*

The play is full of high emotional drama. The girls talk about the priest who gave shirt and stocking of a dead man for identification. The priest had asked them not to let the mother know about the clothes and had feared that it would make Maurya suffer a lot and she would be crying and lamenting. Nora reports the words of the priest as

*...says he, "... if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."*

Cautiousness of the sisters in opening the bundle of clothes to check is suggestive of how they are carried away by grief and worried about the mother. They are scared to open the bundle and do not want to let their mother know. They feel that mother should not wake up and come to see the clothes while inspecting. If it happens so it would be bad for both of them. Cathleen says:

*"Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done. [Coming to the table] It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying."*

The speech act expresses grief over the incident. Cathleen decides to hide the bundle of clothes in the turf loft. As she climbs to hide the bundle, the mother comes in and talks about turf for evening cooking. As they talk about not allowing Bartley to go on the sea, a danger lurks in what Maurya says:

*"He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely."*

The speech act is expressive of her mental agony but Bartley arrives in hurry and asks for rope. Maurya is desolate and thinking of Michael. She has taken it for granted that he is no more and would be washed up by the shore. Her words express great sorrow and regret and she asks him to keep the rope for Michael's grave. She says:

*"I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up to-morrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week, for it's a deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God."*

Bartley is intent on going for the fair for the sale of mare irrespective of the sufferings of the family at the loss of his father and brothers. He gives his mother utter pain by his decision and she expresses regret and hardship over the prospect of only one son being left and he too is going in the death trap. She compares price of thousand horses with that of only son left. Her speech act expresses deep lament over the loss of all men and the prospect of losing



the last son. She says:

*"If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?"*

Bartley suggests Maurya to manage to sell pig with black feet and get some weed and do such work for the family. Maurya compares the price of horse and pig. Bartley talks of the difficulty of only son to manage the home and feels the hardship of living life without anyone else to support family in future. He talks of the reality of life but at the same time his words express lament in the following words:

*"It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work."*

After a lot of lamenting, Maurya is ready for Michael's funeral. The whiteboard of the coffin is suggestive of readiness of the family members for funeral. The fears and worrying of Maurya is seen lamenting that her sons will never come back from the sea. The women discuss about Bartley, who is getting ready to go the sea to start over the family business. Nora and Cathleen are realized that Bartley should go to the fair at Galway to sell the animals, while the hope of Maurya is still that the Priest will prevent from in such dangerous tides. There is a sense of hope in her wish that the Priest would not allow Bartley to go.

As Bartley enters the cottage with plans to go on the sea, Maurya tries to stop him, but he looks for the rope and prepares halter and out of frustration give directive to the sister, Cathleen. He says:

*"(working at the halter, to CATHLEEN) Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going".*

Maury again tries to persuade her son showing him the whiteboards for Michael. He does not pay any attention to her words, gets ready and leaves without taking blessings from his mother. She laments over the situation and expresses her grief saying:

*"Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?"*

Bartley's plans are final and leaves home with crying mother. Maury is in deep agony as he leaves. She sees the danger in his going and cries out praying God that they are losing him. Her words enact suffering of the family.

*"(crying out as he is in the door) He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world."*

Cathleen is not happy with mother and uses a directive speech act to make her give blessings to Bartley. She says it is sorrow when he goes out with unlucky word behind:

*"Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on everyone in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?"*

She further says the he will not survive and expresses lament over mother's continuous talk. She says :

*"There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking for ever."*

Bartley leaves with a red mare and a grey pony tied behind. Cathleen then notices that he has not taken any food and tells Maurya to walk down to the well to give Bartley his food and the blessings. Maurya leaves using a stick that Michael brought, lamenting over how in her family, the old ones never leave anything behind for their heirs, despite that being the general custom.

The famous speech towards the end of the play by Maurya speaks of the condition of the family due to the loss of the men and she disgustingly says that the sea cannot do anything to her after bringing death to her husband and her sons:

*"(raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her) They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me..."*

The following lamenting speech act of Maurya is suggestive of utter desolateness of the mother and her daughters.

Laments are addresses generally to God as Maurya addresses God for help.

*"He's gone now, God spare us, And we'll not see him again.*

*He's gone now, and when the black night is falling,*

*I will have no son left me in the world (.....)"*

It is also appeal for help and expresses the sense that the family has no grudge against anything since they have lost everything.

*"I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening."*

Maurya has no way out in life than to accept the course of events. Her following directive speech act signifies a response to divine act of taking people out of her family and finally has to offer thanks out of regret. She says:

*"(To Nora) Give me the Holy Water, Nora; there's a small sup still on the dresser."*

The last utterance 'I will have no son left me in the world' is suggestive of how a mother has to survive without sons or husband. For a woman, sons embody the future possibility of better happy satisfied life. Without any son she has to live devoid of any support. The lamenting speech act implies her entire future life of suffering.

### Conclusion

Expressive speech acts have underlying psychological drive with their main bases of grief, loss, suffering, desolateness, joy, sadness, approval, disapproval, anger, etc. The play enacts the tragedy of the family and the sufferings of the people left behind. Recurrent deaths in the family have made them lament over the course of life given by almighty. Throughout the play Synge has made effective use of expressive speech acts to give way to the sufferings of the characters and lamenting speech act has been predominantly used in comparison to other expressive speech acts. Laments in the present as well as classic dramatic expressions have remained vividly memorable as they express pathos of the contexts.

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